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SPACE CENTER Roundup

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Astronaut Candidate Class of 2000 to be named

The tension is mounting as the JSC Astronaut Selection Office enters the homestretch in naming the NASA Astronaut Candidate Class of 2000.

This process takes place every other year. This year 3,014 applications were received by the July 1 deadline.

"Our plan is to select candidates every two years in the odd numbered years," said Duane Ross, NASA manager, Astronaut Selection Office. "We establish a deadline for applications near the first of July. At that time we consider all of the applications that we have received. We continue to accept applications after that date, but they will be considered for the next selection."

Teresa Gomez, NASA assistant manager in the Astronaut Selection Office, reviewed this year's batch of applications to ensure that the candidates met basic qualifications. A total of 2,644 applicants qualified. "Once we determine that the applicant meets the basic qualifications, then the information on the application is entered into a database," said Gomez. The database is essential in managing the enormous amount of information that the office receives.

At this point in the process, the JSC director establishes the Astronaut Candidate Selection Rating Panel comprised primarily of current astronauts who have space flight experience. This year's panel

of 22 people reviewed applications during July and August to determine highly qualified applicants. A total of 388 were deemed to be from such individuals.

Upon completing this task, the panel is disbanded and the center director appoints the Astronaut Candidate Selection Board made up of astronauts and members of NASA management. In addition, at this point in the process, the Astronaut Selection Office gathers information from references listed on applications from the highly qualified individuals. Additional medical information is also gathered as necessary.

The Astronaut Candidate Selection Board reviewed applications from highly qualified applicants during the past two months to select candidates to be interviewed. The group of 388 highly qualified individuals will be narrowed down to 120 applicants who will be brought to JSC for interviews with the selection board.

Narrowing the list from those applicants judged to be highly qualified to those who will be interviewed is a difficult task.

"The key qualification we look for is how related and how applicable a person's experience is to the kind of job that astronauts do," said Ross. "If the application and the references indicate that the candidate is a team player and is adaptable to different kinds of situations and environments, that information is as important as a person's educational background."

The key is to have a background in all areas. Academic achievement, participation in athletics, volunteer work in the community—all of these factors are considered.

Weeklong interviews and medical examinations will be conducted with groups of 20 applicants. The Astronaut Selection Office anticipates that all 120 interviews will be completed by the end of January.

Interviews indicate what the candidate is like as a person. "We're selecting people who will fly with each other and live together on orbit for long periods of time," said Ross. "They have to be team players who can get along with others very well."

The next astronaut candidate class will be announced in March or April 2000. The astronaut candidates will report for duty to JSC next summer.

Pilot astronauts serve as both space shuttle commanders and pilots, while mission specialists, working with the commander and pilot, have overall

responsibility for the coordination of shuttle operations in the areas of crew activity planning, consumables usage, experiment and payload operations, and space station assembly and operations.

Mission specialist and pilot astronaut candidates must hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in engineering, biological science, physical science, or mathematics. Mission specialist candidates must possess at least three years of related, progressively responsible, professional experience. Pilot astronaut candidates must have at least 1,000 hours pilot-in-command time in jet aircraft. Mission specialist applicants must be able to pass a NASA Class II space physical. Pilot candidates must be able to pass a NASA Class I space physical.

Mission specialist candidates must be between 58.5 and 76 inches in height, while pilot astronaut candidates must be between 64 and 76 inches. There is no age limit. The average age of selected applicants is 35.

Selected applicants are designated astronaut candidates and assigned to the Astronaut Office at JSC. The astronaut candidates undergo a one- to two-year training and evaluation period during which time they participate in a basic astronaut training program designed to develop the knowledge and skills required for formal mission training upon selection for a flight. Pilot astronaut candidates maintain proficiency in NASA aircraft during their candidate period.

NASA accepts astronaut candidate applications on a continuous basis and plans to make selections every two years as needed. Military applicants must apply through their respective military service. JSC has an agreement with the services that active duty personnel will not be considered unless they have been nominated.

Application forms and other information are available through the World Wide Web at the following address:
<http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/ah/jscjobs/aso/ascan.htm>

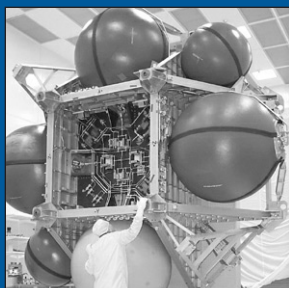
Completed applications must be mailed to NASA, Johnson Space Center, Astronaut Selection Office, Mail Code AHX, 2101 NASA Road 1, Houston, TX 77058.

For more information, contact the Astronaut Selection Office at 281-483-5907.



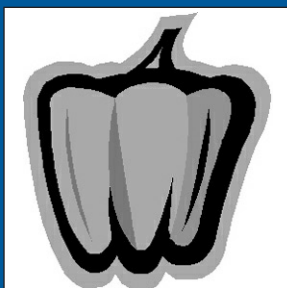
JSC Photo S99E11915 by Robert Markowitz

Teresa Gomez and Duane Ross have managed the astronaut candidate selection process since 1984.



Interim Control
Module nears
completion.

Page 2



Nutritionists
examine role of
diet in space.

Page 4



Open House
photo contest
winners.

Page 7